DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 350 563 CS 011 040

AUTHOR Inglesby, Pamela
TITLE Historical Work in Mass Communication Studies: Literacy, Libraries, and Popular Reading.
PUB DATE Aug 92
NOTE 31p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (75th, Montreal, Quebec, Canada, August 5-8, 1992).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Historical Materials (060)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Cultural Context; *Library Development; *Library Research; *Library Role; *Literacy; Mass Media Role; *Public Libraries; Research Proposals; Social Influences
IDENTIFIERS Free Library of Philadelphia PA; *Historical Background; Literacy as a Social Process

ABSTRACT

Recent work in both the history of education and the influence of popular culture suggests that libraries can be studied as sites where the public is taught--through a variety of mechanisms--important lessons about communication, knowledge and society. Researchers have addressed the interpretive question of whether literacy is tied to progress and the question of whether literacy is always expanding. The nineteenth century was a watershed period as elites began to encourage mass literacy in western Europe and the United States through the support of common schools. There is still a great deal of research to be done on the history of reading since the technological, publishing, and marketing revolutions of the nineteenth century. Public library history has followed two primary intellectual currents. Mainstream public library history, like essentialist media theory, sees the large urban public library as the ideal institution. "Revisionist" library history is more concerned with how social elites have attempted to use public libraries to control other social groups. An ongoing research project is examining the formation and early growth of the Free Library of Philadelphia, which occurred primarily during the Progressive Era. The research is guided by the assumption that mass communication (as an important component of culture) often serves as an arena for social conflict. The research involves the description and analysis of the social and physical environment of a particular historically situated institution of mass communication reception in the hope this will cast light on the complex network of relationships that can exist between society, mass communication, and meaning. (Twenty-three references are attached.) (RS)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

GRADUATE STUDENT PAPER

QUALITATIVE STUDIES DIVISION

AEJMC 1992 CONVENTION

ED350563

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Pamela Inglesby

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

HISTORICAL WORK IN MASS COMMUNICATION STUDIES: LITERACY, LIBRARIES, AND POPULAR READING

Pamela Inglesby
Annenberg School for Communication
University of Pennsylvania
3620 Walnut Street
Philadelphia, PA 19104

CS011040

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Introduction

Mass communication is usually defined by communication scholars as a process involving the production, distribution and reception of messages on a broad social scale, but only in the past two decades has the problem of reception been given extensive and critical attention. One way to understand how people make meaning of mass media messages is to study specific institutional contexts of reception, and work currently being done in this area is looking at a wide range of situations in which people interpret the media, such as family gatherings, classrooms, and fan clubs. This work examines not only how people bring their own experiences and sensibilities to bear on media content, but also on how social institutional forces shape and constrict the range of possible interpretations.

This paper is concerned with the public library, a 19th century invention that has not received much attention as a mass communication institution. Public libraries are particularly interesting because they have not been perceived until recently as a place where the state and elites attempt to exercise power through the control of knowledge, partly because libraries have not been nearly as influential on the citizenry as a whole as schools, but also because libraries have been seen as a site of self-education (with implications of empowerment) or as a site of amusement (with implications of triviality). Recent work in both the history of education and the influence of popular culture, however, suggests that libraries can be studied as sites where

the public is taught -- through a variety of mechanisms -- important lessons about communication, knowledge and society.

My own work posits the library as an institution that can (and has) done more than just store and distribute books. The library has encouraged not only the reading of particular books and materials over others, it has also shaped ways of thinking and feeling about books and reading and knowledge and their relationship to other spheres of life. Because public libraries have been controlled by coalitions of different groups and displayed different organizational characteristics in different times and places, much research needs to be done before generalizations can be made about their social role.

This paper concludes with discussion of a historical research project that investigates the founding of the Free Library of Philadelphia in the 1890's and its extraordinary growth during the Progressive Era. In order to place the project in appropriate intellectual and scholarly context, however, I first review some theoretical and historical work that has been done on literacy, and in particular on the increase in popular reading that occurred in the 19th and early 20th century U.S. The nature and social significance of this "reading revolution" must be considered before turning to the emergence of the public library in the mid-19th century and its expansion during the Progressive Era.

The significance of literacy

Goody and Watt's (1968) influential essay "The Consequences of Literacy" is often cited as the work most responsible for generating interest in reading and writing in the last 30 years, likely because of the audacious claims it makes for literacy's effects on culture and history. The authors argue that certain writing systems (in particular, the phonetic alphabet) made widespread literacy possible, and thus produced literate societies that differed from non-literate ones in a number of respects, including the democratic distribution of knowledge, an ability to separate history from myth, and the development of epistemology and critical detachment.

Goody and Watt's universalistic, simplistic definition of literacy and their technologically determinist theory of literacy's effects has been tested by several anthropologists and historians; Scribner and Cole's (1981) work on Vai literacy in Liberia can be viewed as an exemplar of this research as they conclude by raising many of the same key questions about literacy that other work has. Perhaps their most interesting "finding" is that studying literacy in a pluralistic society like the Vai was much more complicated than they had expected. There was no single set of activities that could be labeled "literacy". They write:

> All our information points towards the specificity of literacy. Just as each script has its own course of learning and carries a special segment of the larger social system's literacy functions, so each group of script literates is part of a somewhat different social network and participates in occupational and other cultural domains in a

somewhat different manner.

In general, Scribner and Cole's research is similar to that of many others who, thinking they were studying literacy's "effects", wound up producing an extensive body of work on the tremendous diversity of literate contexts, practices and implications across both time and space; the ideal society in which mass literacy and modern values had replaced important oral communication and traditional modes of thought was never found.

In their comprehensive volume on the history of literacy in the United States, Kaestle et al (1991) summarize various trends and research questions they see in work done on literacy since the '60s and suggest related fields of study that literacy historians may want to investigate. One major interpretive question that recent work has addressed is whether literacy is tied to progress, both of societies as wholes and of individuals seeking to better themselves economically and intellectually. They point out that literacy can and has been used for a variety of purposes by governments and individuals, purposes related to both repression and freedom, constraint and change. The idea that widespread literacy is always a marker of democracy and equality has been questioned by historians of the U.S. and modern Europe such as Harvey Graff, who has written extensively about how literacy has been used to maintain, rather than challenge, social structure and middle class hegemony. Whether or not literacy is related to progress depends, Kaestle et al write (p. 28), "upon who is judging, whose literacy is at issue, and whose

benefit is being considered."

A related question is whether literacy has historically caused social change or been a consequence of it, with consensus emerging around the notion of reciprocal influence. Havelock (1982) and Goody & Watt, among others, argue that writing led to new methods of administration, commerce and even philosophy, although Kaestle et al note that the tendency to dichotomize cultures into "traditional" and "modern" or "primitive" and "advanced" is now out of favor, and that the work of scholars such as Gough (1968) have questioned and modified many of Goody & Watt's sweeping claims.

Another focus of research is the question of whether literacy is always expanding. This is a difficult research problem because how one measures literacy depends both on the available evidence (self reports, signatures on documents, records of book ownership) and the researcher's own definition of literacy. Some research has focused on the nature of the writing system as a factor in the spread of literacy, but more significant work has looked at the context into which writing was introduced and spread or did not spread; the work of historians such as Clanchy (1979) has focused on particular political and social reasons why writing might or might not become used widely and accepted by a population as a legitimate form of authority. Another question is whether it has been associated technologies such as the printing press that have made literacy widely practiced rather than the perfection of writing systems. While

Havelock focuses on the nature of the phonetic alphabet, the work of Eisenstein (1980) suggests that the technology of printing actually made possible many of the "effects" others have attributed to literacy itself (such as the spread of knowledge during the Renaissance).

How can these questions be addressed empirically? Darnton (1989) has proposed a model for analyzing the life cycle of a book that can be used as a framework for studying literacy. He outlines a communications circuit that runs from the author to the publisher, the printer, the shipper, the bookseller, and the reader, who influences the other members both as imaginary audience and as a real individual. The entire circuit is influenced by several external factors, including intellectual influences and publicity, political and legal sanctions, and "the economic and social conjuncture." His model is top heavy on the production end, but is useful if we add other institutions of distribution after the bookseller (such as the library, the school and peer associations). As an example, this broad approach to literacy would see "censorship" not solely as an external social practice that affects literacy, but as a literacy practice itself (a method for controlling the production or distribution of texts) that results from an interaction between one or more institutions in the circuit and perhaps institutions in the broader social context as well.

Where literacy ends and society begins is, in this framework, flexible and not particularly important, nor is what

literacy "does" to people and society; the more interesting question is what people do to or for each other, using literacy as a means, and what are the consequences of this social activity. Reading, for example -- the focus of the remainder of this paper -- has been perceived by some historians and media theorists as an agent of control and by others as an agent of autonomy. Kaestle et al (p. 27), paraphrasing historian Lawrence Stone, note that:

> if you teach a man to read the Bible, he may also read pornography or seditious literature; put another way, if a man teaches a woman to read so that she may know her place, she may learn that she deserves his.

The growth of the mass reading public

Kaestle et al argue that the period from 1600 to 1900 saw Western Europe and the United States move from restricted to mass literacy, although it is difficult to measure which groups were how literate, and what it meant for their lives and social relationships. The 19th century was certainly a watershed period as elites began to encourage mass literacy through support of common schools, which -- like the printing press -- served as a support system for fostering mass literacy. The increasing availability of popular reading matter, prompted by both increasing literacy levels and innovations in printing, led in turn to greater literacy -- a circular trend Kaestle et al note is found throughout the history of literacy in the West. The combination of "increasing literacy, expanding mass education, and developing technologies" that led to production of reading

matter constitute what Davidson (1989:15) and others have termed a "reading revolution" in the first half of the 19th century. Other factors that encouraged the spread of literacy in the 19th century were the nature of work people were asked to do (the growth of the commercial sphere), and the dominance of Protestantism. By 1850, the rudimentary literacy rates of white men and women in the U.S. (as reported to census officials) were nearly equal, but large gaps existed between native whites, foreign born whites, and nonwhites; disparities also existed due to region, income and urbanity.

The increasing production of popular literature was both a cause and result of rising literacy rates. Some scholars have looked at the consequences of this literature for cultural life; for example, Davidson's (1986) research on novel reading in the early Republic stressed the active role of the reader and the emotionally and intellectually liberating effect novels could have. As popular reading (and popular literature) increased, the market became more diversified, and the existence of "lowbrow" material engendered concern from elites who feared imaginative fiction and the lurid penny press would pollute or stimulate the minds of the lower classes. Kaestle et al write:

> In spite of the interpretive problems it poses, diversification is part of the history of literacy and must be addressed. Indeed, at the time the cracks in the reading public were developing, contemporaries reacted to the threat of social fragmentation by trying to govern reading habits. This is a major theme in the history of literacy, and it helps tie literacy to the socioeconomic context, not only because the divergent reading publics were identified with social classes, but because the new popular reading materials emerged as popular culture became commercialized.

The shift from cohesion to diversification led to stratification. As Davidson (1989:14) writes, "as basic literacy and even book ownership became more commonplace, it became necessary to enhance one's status by differentiating a proclaimed elite from lower and less worthy forms of literate culture." This occurred not only in literature but also in other cultural forms. Levine (1988), for example, chronicles the increasing stratification of music, theater and art in the 19th century, which he interprets as elites rejecting a shared culture in favor of their own "sacred", restricted cultural forms. The work of Davidson, Levine and others leaves us with the impression that cultural diversification was both a healthy expression of pluralism, and an elitist strategy that used culture to exaggerate and naturalize social class.

Kaestle et al claim that work on reading in the U.S. during the period following 1880 has produced less knowledge. Much work has been done on the publishing industry, authors, and texts, but little on reading publics. Of some interest is the work of Wilson (1983), who talks about a perceived transformation in the nature of reading in the late 19th century occasioned by a new kind of literature which was more realistic, detailed, and objective. Reading became less internal and contemplative, he argues, and more superficial and managed. The "gentle reader," peer of the author, became the "consumer," guided and manipulated by magazine and best-seller writers. Wilson analyzes the economic context of this shift (the growth of consumer culture),

but does not discuss its significance for cultural hierarchy or accompanying social practices. It is also possible that the "shift" he describes is actually an expansion of the types of reading that it was possible for people to engage in, rather than a complete change in or debasement of reading.

Work on production and distribution of books and newspapers tells us something about the type and amount of material in circulation; studies on the growth of book clubs and libraries, for example, as well as daily newspapers and magazines, reveal increasing demand for low and middlebrow reading material well into the 20th century, even in the face of competition from movies and the broadcast media. Also, contemporary empirical work in the reader response or uses and gratifications traditions suggest how people in the near past may have understood popular literature and incorporated its themes and lessons into their lives (e.g., see Radway (1984)). There is clearly still a great deal of research to be done, however, on the history of reading since the technological, publishing and marketing revolutions of the 19th century.

The public library as social actor

Graff (1991:25) writes that "there is no doubt that the relevance and the relations of library history to the history of literacy bear far more serious attention and study than they have thus far received." Writing for an audience of library scholars, he is to some extent apologizing for not having considered the

role of libraries in the intellectual and imaginative lives of the 18th and 19th century Americans he studies, but the marginalization of library history is not his fault. Until recently, library history has been practiced by scholars trained in and focused on libraries, rather than by historians or communication scholars. It has borrowed methodologies, theories and ideas from other disciplines in order to illuminate its own questions about libraries, librarians and patrons, but often after a great time lag; e.g., "revisionist" history became popular within library history at the same time scholars in other areas had abandoned such work in favor of approaches that integrate the study of structure and agency.

Public library history has followed two primary intellectual currents. Mainstream public library history, like essentialist media theory, sees the large urban public library as the ideal institution. It therefore tells the story of how elite libraries finally gave way to the public library, and how the public library finally figured out its mission was to serve (rather than control) the reading public, and particularly to provide educational opportunities to disadvantaged groups such as the working class and immigrants.[1] "Revisionist" library history (influenced by critical work in the history of public education)

---

[1] The classic works are Shera's Foundations of the Public Library: The Origins of the American Public Library Movement in New England, 1629-1855 (1949) and Ditzion's Arsenals of a Democratic Culture: A Social History of the American Public Library Movement in New England and the Middle Atlantic States from 1850 to 1900 (1947).

is more concerned with how social elites have attempted to use public libraries to control (both intellectually and physically) social groups that were considered potentially dangerous, such as -- surprise, surprise -- the working class and immigrants. This work was pioneered by library historian Michael Harris with his seminal 1973 Library Journal essay, "The Purpose of the American Public Library: A Revisionist Interpretation of History," which is worth reviewing briefly.

Harris begins by focusing attention on the founding of the Boston Public Library in the 1850s, which is generally considered to be the first major public library in the U.S. Traditional library history, he says, gives a "warm and comforting explanation" of the growth of the public library, beginning with the victory in Boston by "a group of humanitarian and liberal reformers" over "an aristocratic intellectual class" who wanted to make the public library an elitist center for scholarly research. The reformers, the mythical history says, "insisted that the public library be dedicated to the continuing education of the 'common man' and that its collections and services be as broadly popular as possible." Harris argues, however, that this narrative is contradicted by the facts:

> One is to believe, for instance, that the public library movement began in a passion of liberal and humanitarian zeal, and yet public libraries were generally cold, rigidly inflexible, and elitist institutions from the beginning. It is also commonly believed that the origins of the public library movement testify to the power of popular democracy in this country. And yet, everyone knows that historically only a very small portion of the eligible users have ever crossed the threshold of a public library.

Harris argues that the founders of the Boston library were typical mid-19th century conservatives, who believed in (among other things) natural inequality and the importance of religion and morality, and who did not believe in majority rule or attempts at social or economic leveling. One impetus for the creation of the public library was an increase in immigration, which led to a perceived need for assimilation through adult education. The goal of one of its founders, George Ticknor, was "to contribute to the 'uplift' of the masses and to make men sober, righteous, conservative, patient, and devout -- in short, to make others more like himself."

Harris chronicles how this concept of the public library as a "stabilizing" agent in society did not change through the 19th century. The goal of the librarian was to "discipline the masses" through encouraging them to read the "best" books in an atmosphere of physical and emotional cleanliness and order. Although librarians became increasingly interested towards the end of the century in library management and rationalization, Harris argues that the authoritarian program begun at the Boston library did not disappear, "it simply became less obvious in the increasingly aimless and bureaucratic nature of public library service." This authoritarian tendency re-emerged strongly, he says, during the Americanization efforts of the early 20th century, and did not disappear until World War II.

Several library scholars challenged Harris' claims in the pages of the Library Journal and The Journal of Library History,

but the split his writings caused in the field has been partially mended through the legitimation of the kinds of questions he raised and an increased interest in the political and ideological role of the public library and its librarians. Many scholars have looked at the social and intellectual characteristics of those who founded or contributed funding to public libraries. What kinds of people were they? What problems did they think public libraries would solve? What kinds of people were expected to use the libraries? Much of this work has focused on wealthy philanthropists, such as Andrew Carnegie, who gave generously to public libraries and spoke explicitly about how they expected libraries to contribute to social order and cohesion in a time when ethnic and political diversity posed apparent threats.

What effect did this rhetoric have on particular libraries? One library historian has attempted to locate and describe specific library practices around the turn of the century that were related to the cultural goals Carnegie and others forwarded. Du Mont's Reform and Reaction: The Big City Public Library in American Life (1977) looks at the establishment of library policies and services from 1890 to 1915 which, she says, form the basis of contemporary library work. Du Mont claims that public libraries in the 1870s and 1880s had reflected the interests of artisan and merchant patrons, which allowed lower class patrons to learn the values of those socially above them. In order to serve and assimilate a larger and very different immigrant clientele, however, the library had to change. Librarians around

the country echoed the hope expressed by Boston elites earlier in the century that the library could educate the poor and immigrants out of vice and into conservative patriotism. They advocated special services for immigrants and children, whose needs were defined by middle and upper class library leaders who took their cues from business and government leaders. Although the labor movement objected to the influence of men like Carnegie over public library development, such objections did not stop communities from accepting philanthropists' funds.[2]

Du Mont claims that libraries began at the end of the century to model themselves after the businesses that to a large extent supported them, trying to achieve the goal of providing a large number of patrons with appropriate books as efficiently as possible. Such an approach led to innovations such as open shelving, inter-library loan services, advertising through public relations work, and the growth of extension work and branch libraries. Efforts were also made to attract adults to libraries through social activities such as club meetings and public lectures. Du Mont finds most problematic those service policies of the reformist public library which were (p. 82) "to help readers not only with their reading but also with shaping their thinking and behavior to conform to the standards of the middle-

[2] Eugene Debs is known to have objected to the support of public libraries by those who made their money from the toil of workers. He is quoted to have said (p. 44) "we want libraries and we will have them in glorious profusion when capitalism is abolished and workingmen are no longer robbed by the philanthropic pirates of the Carnegie class."

class community." Such services included reference work, in which the librarian helped the patron choose appropriate books; the growth of children's services, the purposes of which included providing youth with an alternative to lowbrow culture and vice, training them in how to use books, and teaching them middle-class manners; sponsorship of conservative lectures on culture, history and practical matters for working people; and service to immigrants that focused on cultural assimilation (including lessons in behavior and attitudes as well as in language and knowledge) and individual self-advancement.[3]

Although Du Mont addresses the relationship between social reform and public library practices, her work provides little more than a summary of reformers' motivations for expanding public libraries and an overview of new services that a few libraries put into place in response. She treats all reformers and all public libraries as interchangeable, and does not even note possible regional variations which one might expect to find; the goals of funders (public and private), library managers, librarians, patrons, and political leaders, and the relationships between these groups, also need to be examined in order to understand how new policies and services were the result of

---

[3] It should be noted that some libraries helped immigrant groups maintain their cultural heritage through sponsorship of cultural events, acquisition of foreign language materials, and other services. Du Mont claims that such services became less common in the early 20th century as social concern about the "foreignness" of immigrants grew, and that Americanization programs in libraries simultaneously increased.

negotiations and politics, not simply the automatic result of shifting middle-class ideological preferences.

Two authors who examine in much more detail the changing nature of public librarianship as a profession shed some light on the diversity of library approaches and services across the nation and across time from the late 19th to the early 20th century. Garrison's Apostles of Culture: The Public Librarian and American Society, 1876-1920 (1979) looks at how librarians debated their role and goals, and Geller's Forbidden Books in American Public Libraries, 1876-1939: A Study in Cultural Change (1984) considers book acquisition practices and attitudes towards censorship as indicative of the changing nature of the public library.

Garrison begins her work by making four somewhat contradictory points about public library history (pp. xii-xiv). First, she agrees with other historians that public library founders "conceived the potential uses of the library as a means of arresting lower-class alienation from traditional culture." Second, she points out that given the social context, it is not surprising that public libraries were founded by elites who wished to perpetuate their power through dissemination of their own cultural values. Third, she suggests that in spite of library founders' intentions, there were many librarians who were sympathetic to mass culture and "welcomed the dissolution of Victorian morality" which set the stage for ongoing conflict at meetings of the American Library Association. Finally, she

argues that despite its conservative origins, the library was a less intellectually restrictive institution than the public school, and that it did provide some of its patrons with social mobility and educational opportunity.

Garrison summarizes here the complex character of the librarians she studied (p. xiv):

> The librarians whom I am considering looked forward as well as backward. They were simply men and women of their time, shaped by an educational and social background to respond in a similar way to the confusing industrialized world not of their making. With a cultural arrogance limited only by their moral sincerity, they upheld their mission to serve the masses who supposedly sought material and moral advancement through education. As social critics, they shared a faith in progress and looked forward to moderate reform as the answer to the country's problems. Their drive towards professionalism combined romantic ideas of reform, democratic principles, genteel liberalism, and the missionary impulse with their own frustrated desires for greater status and standing. The most prominent characteristic of their social thought is its ambivalence. They maintained conflicting desires -- to elevate public thought and to meet public demand. It was not authoritarianism which dominated their thought. It was, rather, the tensions within their code -- between the censorship and the consumership models of the library.

This ambivalence can be seen in the late 19th century shift from what Garrison calls "the missionary phase" to the more modern service-oriented approach, with an emphasis on bureaucratic and technical expertise rather than moral management. This shift is embodied in the rise of the "library hostess," one of the most significant aspects of public library service during the Progressive Era. The fact that librarianship as a profession attracted a great many women greatly influenced the late 19th century library; the attempt to "give people what they want" while at the same time mitigate the effects of popular

literature, and the development of special programs for children rather than for "rougher" groups such as working class men, are definitely gender-linked. Female librarians embodied a tension within the profession "between the elitist desire to control mass reading and the reality of the situation in the public library -- an institution which was not only staffed by women but was also forced to meet reader demand if it were to survive" (Garrison (1975)).

Although the public library became increasingly less authoritarian during the 20th century, Garrison may overemphasize the role that gender played in this trend. Other factors that influenced library policies and management approaches, especially external ones, need to be studied in order to place her thesis in perspective. For example, did the reformers who helped to found public libraries in the late 19th century lose interest in them in the following decades? Did local governments start to provide more funding (and thus more guidance) to libraries than private elite philanthropists in the early 20th century?

Geller outlines three questions that the library profession faced and attempted to systematically resolve during and after the Progressive Era (p. xix): Should libraries supply patrons with elite culture, or meet the demand for popular culture? Should they act neutrally with respect to conflicts within their communities, or be active advocates for certain groups and ideas? What should their attitude be towards "deviant ideas outside the framework of conventional debate, ideas that seem to threaten the

moral or the social order"? She chronicles the same shift as Garrison, from what she calls the role of the librarian as "moral censor" in 1876 (marked by elitism, advocacy, and censorship) to the role of the librarian as "guardian of the freedom to read" in 1939 (marked by populism, neutrality, and open-mindedness). She sees the shift as related to a change within the profession of what the "public interest" meant, a concept always referred to (implicitly or explicitly) when library policies are adopted or changed. Like Garrison, she identifies a "missionary phase" in which censorship was seen as a public duty, followed in the early 20th century by an ambivalent era in which librarians "attempted to resolve competing demands for restriction and for controversial books" through providing certain books to certain readers upon request (p. xvi). She differs from Garrison, however, by locating the "critical shift" in the 1920's, rather than with the feminization of the profession at the end of the 19th century.

Rather than looking solely at internal professional dynamics, as Garrison did, Geller places this shift within the context of major social and literary changes such as the morality crusades of the late 1800's, the development of literary naturalism, "the peculiar mix of political liberalism and moral conservatism of the Progressive years," and the underlying processes of secularization and nationalization. Although this broad context doesn't allow her to draw many conclusions, it does reveal some profound relationships between social/cultural change

and communication practices; for example, one of the external factors Geller finds significant for library practices is a weakening of restrictive moral laws and a corresponding increase in sedition laws in the early 20th century that suggest a new separation of public and private concerns. All political behavior was defined as of public concern, and subject to legislation, while moral and religious issues were seen as "private" and within the realm of individual freedom. It isn't hard to imagine how such an ideology would work itself out in the public library.

The Free Library of Philadelphia as an institution of reception: A research project in communication history

Michael Schudson (1991) has written of the need for the "history proper" of communication, which "considers the relationship of the media to cultural, political, economic, or social history and addresses the question: how do changes in communication influence and how are they influenced by other aspects of social change?" He says that while "macro-history is interested only in what communication tells us about something else," history proper is concerned with "either what communication tells us about society or what society tells us about communication or both."

Historians have demonstrated that literacy practices change along with the social environment; both factors which can be considered a part of literacy (such as the spread of reading

ability, the growth and increasing diversity of reading material) and those which seem unrelated to literacy (broad social, political and economic trends and motivations) are responsible. The influence of the latter on the former, or the interdependence of the two, can be investigated by looking at institutions of reception where large social forces and specific literacy practices meet and have the opportunity to influence each other. The public library is clearly such a site of potential social power and negotiation.

How does the historical study of media reception help us understand the relationship between society and communication? The debates that Garrison and Geller have chronicled between morally liberal and conservative librarians constitute not only a conversation about books but also about the nature of acceptable culture in a dynamic and threatening social order. Perhaps the librarians perceived the development of a new, truly American culture; such a culture was embodied in the content of the period's popular culture and the choices many readers made. Should this popular culture be ignored, censored, or replaced with elite culture? Did it represent "American values" or just the debased preferences of the lower classes? These issues have been a matter of debate among cultural elites since the 19th century, but we can expect that they have been answered differently by different groups at different times.

My own research on the formation and early growth of the Free Library of Philadelphia, which occurred primarily during the

Progressive Era, is guided by the assumption that mass communication (as an important component of culture) often serves as an arena for social conflict. I have been particularly influenced by neo-Marxist work that describes how, to use Bourdieu's (1990) term, "cultural violence" has come to replace physical force as a primary means of social control in the west. This approach is also used by Foucault (1979) when he describes the emergence of institutions that sought to control subordinate groups through visual surveillance and regulation of the body (common practices of institutions of mass communication reception) rather than through physical punishment. This work encourages perception of the public library as an institution through which the state and elites might logically try to control potentially problematic bodies and minds.

Levine's work begins to examine how Progressive Era elites used culture as a way to manage perceived social problems. He describes three ways in which they dealt with the disturbing new intermingling of classes and ethnic groups that characterized urban spaces of the time. First, they retreated into their own private spaces as often as possible; second, they transformed public spaces "by rules, systems of taste, and canons of behavior of their own choosing"; and third, most important for my study, they sought "to convert the strangers so that their modes of behavior and cultural predilections emulated those of the elites." Levine chronicles how these elites remade institutions such as the orchestra, the opera, the theater, the park and the

museum from "places of entertainment" to "sacred precincts" through the disciplining of audiences.

Levine's work calls for further research because of the provocative hypotheses he has generated about the social uses of culture. By asserting that cultural projects can be seen as political (in the sense that they are at least partially about maintaining social power), he -- like Bourdieu -- diverts our attention away from the content of popular and elite culture and towards the contexts in which it is created, institutionalized and consumed. His work on museums during the Progressive Era shows that one of their primary functions was to socialize inexperienced visitors into elite attitudes and behaviors towards art in general, aside from the loftier goal of making classics available to the public.

One of the questions I am investigating is if and how the same socialization towards literacy took place in public libraries, which is a different way of framing the question of what public libraries accomplished than that used by library historians. Most library historians, it might be said, are like old-fashioned communication scholars; they want to know who read what, when, and with what effect. Although I think these are important questions, I am more concerned with describing the overall social institutional environments in which reading activities take place; in this case, what are the forces that overdetermined the social construction of the public library and how patrons experienced it?

I am currently looking at the early history of the Free Library of Philadelphia, from its founding in 1891 through the late 1920s, by which time it had expanded from a few rooms in City Hall to an enormous branch system built around a magnificent new Central Building on the city's faux Champs Elysees, the Benjamin Franklin Parkway. I am examining a variety of materials, including the minutes of the library's Board of Trustees; the library's annual reports; the library's administrative files; the personal correspondence of the first two librarians; local press accounts and commentaries on the library's growth and activities; city governmental records pertaining to the library; biographical material on and correspondence of the library's founders, trustees and librarians; and architectural plans and photographs of the central library buildings and its branches. The questions I hope to answer using these materials can be categorized as follows:

What was the social organization of the library system? Who were the trustees, librarians, donors, patrons, and others? What were their social relationships to each other -- both in the context of turn-of-the-century urban Philadelphia, and in the context of the library system? How did specific procedures, rules and regulations codify and maintain these relationships?

What sorts of materials were collected by the library? What percentage of the collection was books, periodicals, visual materials, music, etc.? What was the ratio of fiction to non-fiction materials, how was the demand for popular materials

addressed, how were political materials dealt with, etc.?

How were attitudes towards these various media and materials communicated to patrons -- e.g., through rules and regulations, educational programs, informal social contact, physical display, etc.? How were attitudes towards the public library, literature, knowledge, reading, and other more abstract concepts communicated to patrons -- e.g., through architecture, explicit and implicit codes of conduct, etc.?

This research will allow me to describe and analyze the social and physical environment of a particular historically-situated institution of mass communication reception. Knowing what materials were made available to patrons, under what conditions and restrictions, and accompanied by what cultural messages, should lead to a better understanding of the process of mass communication reception: how people make choices about what media and messages to pay attention to, and how they make sense of them. Locating institutions of reception in particular historical and social contexts -- or, better, seeing them as products of particular historical moments and social forces -- will also help us better understand the complex network of relationships that can exist between society, mass communication and meaning.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Bourdieu, Pierre and Jean-Claude Passeron. Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture, Second Edition. Translated by Richard Nice. London: Sage, 1990.

Clanchy, Michael M. From Memory to Written Record: England, 1066-1307. Harvard University Press, 1979.

Darnton, Robert. "What is the History of Books?" in Reading in America: Literature and Social History, editor Cathy Davidson. The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989, pp. 27-52.

Davidson, Cathy. Revolution and the Word: The Rise of the Novel in America. Oxford University Press, 1986.

Davidson, Cathy. "Introduction" to Reading in America: Literature and Social History, editor Cathy Davidson. The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989, pp. 1-26.

Ditzion, Sidney. Arsenals of a Democratic Culture: A Social History of the American Public Library Movement in New England and the Middle Atlantic States from 1850 to 1900. Chicago: American Library Association, 1947.

Du Mont, Rosemary Ruhig. Reform and Reaction: The Big City Public Library in American Life. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1977.

Eisenstein, Elizabeth. The Printing Press As An Agent of Change: Communications and Cultural Transformations in Early-Modern Europe. Cambridge University Press, 1980.

Foucault, Michel. Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison. New York: Random House, 1979.

Garrison, Dee. Apostles of Culture: The Public Librarian and American Society, 1876-1920. New York: Free Press, 1979.

Garrison, Dee. "Rejoinder." The Journal of Library History 10, April 1975, pp. 111-116.

Geller, Evelyn. Forbidden Books in American Public Libraries, 1876-1939: A Study in Cultural Change. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1984.

Goody, Jack, and Ian Watt. "The Consequences of Literacy." In Literacy in Traditional Societies, ed. Jack Goody. Cambridge, 1968, pp. 27-68.

Gough, Kathleen. "Implications of Literacy in Traditional China and India." In Literacy in Traditional Societies, ed. Jack Goody. Cambridge, 1968, pp. 70-84.

Graff, Harvey J. "Literacy, Libraries, Lives: New Social and Cultural Histories." Libraries & Culture 26(1), Winter 1991, pp. 24-45.

Harris, Michael. "The Purpose of the American Public Library: A Revisionist Interpretation of History." Library Journal 98, 15 September 1973, pp. 2509-2514.

Havelock, Eric A. The Literate Revolution in Greece and Its Cultural Consequences. Princeton University Press, 1982.

Kaestle, Carl F., Helen Damon-Moore, Lawrence C. Stedman, Katherine Tinsley, and William Vance Trollinger, Jr. Literacy in the United States: Readers and Reading since

1880. Yale University Press, 1991.

Levine, Lawrence W. Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America. Harvard University Press, 1988.

Radway, Janice A. Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature. University of North Carolina Press, 1984.

Schudson, Michael. "Media contexts: Historical approaches to communication studies." In A handbook of qualitative methodologies for mass communication research, edited by Klaus Bruhn Jensen and Nicholas W. Jankowski. New York: Routledge, 1991.

Scribner, Sylvia, and Michael Cole. The Consequences of Literacy. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981.

Shera, Jesse. Foundations of the Public Library: The Origins of the American Public Library Movement in New England, 1629-1855. University of Chicago Press, 1949.

Wilson, Christopher. "The Rhetoric of Consumption: Mass-Market Magazines and the Demise of the Gentle Reader, 1880-1920." In The Culture of Consumption: Critical Essays in American History, 1880-1980. Editors Richard Wightman Fox and T.J. Jackson Lears. Pantheon Books, 1983.